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“Bunk”

“History is more or less bunk”
HENRY FORD, Chicago Tribune, 1916

Pioneer’s mysterious Indian connection

A curious but interesting aside to the life of Hunters Hill pioneer Jules Joubert (1824-1907), has come to light in Tasmania.

It concerns an Indian boy by the name of Chokey Nuroo. The connection between the pair is well documented in various articles that have surfaced there. French-born Jules came to live in Hunters Hill around 1855, close to his older brother Didier, who had already settled in the area. The brothers bought land and were prominent in speculative housing development on the peninsula. They were at the forefront of establishing Hunters Hill as a municipality and opening it up



as a desirable residential location. In contrast to the more staid Didier, Jules was an ambitious entrepreneur who roamed far and wide, often running up against authoritarian opposition and making money and then losing it. Around 1875 he was sacked from his job as exhibition organiser with the Agricultural Society of NSW. Disgusted at his treatment, Joubert eventually quit Sydney in 1881, the year his brother Didier died. In his subsequent wanderings, he organised an exhibition in Perth in 1881 and in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1882. From there he travelled to India, where for most of 1882 and 1883, he organised the Calcutta Exhibition which was held in 1884. His travelogue, *Shavings and Scrapings from many parts*, seems to have been aptly named.

It was in Calcutta that his link with a young Indian boy was made. By all accounts [personal accounts and newspaper reports], Jules “adopted” nine-year old Chokey - possibly an Anglicised corruption of the Hindi word Chokra, meaning boy. However, it is unlikely that it was a formal adoption arrangement.

How he came across Chokey remains something of a mystery. He was obviously not the father of the boy as Chokey was born in 1874, well before Jules arrived in India. What is known is that Jules hired several local manservants to assist him while in the country; possibly Chokey was a junior member of that entourage. Other suggestions are that Chokey ran away from home and befriended Jules at the year-long Calcutta Exhibition, or even was a stowaway on the ship in which Jules returned to Australia. Whatever the circumstances of their coming together, Chokey is said to have been displayed at Australian exhibitions in which Jules was later involved. He was promoted

as a “flesh and blood specimen from the exotic east”. In 1891, Jules and Chokey arrived in Tasmania to set up yet another exhibition with news reports describing the then 17-year-old as “Joubert’s Indian val-et”.

Their paths then diverged with Chokey deciding to stay on in Tasmania while Jules returned to Melbourne. The industrious Chokey became a successful businessman, first working as a provodore supplying ships that plied between the island and the mainland and then buying a former sanatorium at Eaglehawk Neck on the Tasman Peninsula and running it as a



lucrative resort hotel.

Chokey remained manager of the Lufra Hotel for over 30 years, where he and his wife and seven children lived. He died aged 66 in 1941. *Chris Schofield*

Pictures of Chokey Nuroo Courtesy Lufra Hotel, Eaglehawk Neck.

From the Newspapers

“Kind sir, pray give me a shilling for my six hungry children.”

“Awfully sorry, but I’m not buying hungry children just now; fact is, I’ve got nine of my own at home already.”

*Cumberland Mercury
Saturday 30 March 1895*

SPECIAL EDITION

To allow members of the Historical Society to keep in touch while it is not possible to hold meetings, the committee has decided to publish additional editions of BUNK.

Some of the articles will be about people and events outside the scope of life in Hunters Hill.

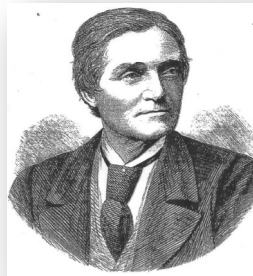
We hope you enjoy them.

Peep of Day

This is a chapter from *Shavings & Scrapes From Many Parts*, the memoirs of Jules Joubert.

On the 31st day of July, 1824, I made my *entrée* at Angoulême, one of the prettiest towns in France - a town now seldom visited by tourists, owing to its peculiar position on the summit of a sugar-loaf-shaped hill, almost surrounded by the river Charente - too steep for a railway. The engineers who planned the iron road in that locality avoided Angoulême, so that even in this age of progress my native town is, I may say, what it was when I left it many, many years ago - a quiet, unpretentious city, merely known by the paper mills, which afford the principal item of trade of its inhabitants. These mills, in the early part of the present century, belonged to my grandfather; and to this day the water lines on the paper manufactured at Angoulême bear the names "Laroche-Joubert," the former family having intermarried with ours. Earlier than it is usual now to put a youth to school, I was sent to Bordeaux, and made to plough up Latin and Greek under a most strict and overbearing taskmaster. In those

days, the easy hours and lazy system of education now in vogue were unknown. Strict discipline - such, indeed, as would now cause a mutiny in a penitentiary - was considered the right and proper treatment in the best regulated schools. Even Dickens has been mild in his description of scholastic comforts. I confess that I little relished the scanty food, the corporeal punishment, and long dreary hours spent at my first school at Bordeaux. The system of schooling now in vogue may - and I feel sure, does - bring about quite as good a result as far as education is concerned; but I still think that the discipline and hardship of the old system had its beneficial effects. I have still a strong impression of those old days, when the first bell used to wake us at 6 AM, winter and summer; ten minutes allowed to dress; marched to a trough of iced water, in winter, for ablutions; then into a cold, dreary schoolroom - each boy provided with a tallow dip to lighten the darkness of his desk - where, with fingers benumbed with cold, he had to dive into "Æsop" or "Cornelius Nepos," translate Homer and Virgil on an empty stomach, and with heavy eye-lids, until 8 o'clock, when a slice of dry bread and very much christened milk of doubtful origin would be handed over on our way to the playground. Thus fortified we had to wait till 11 for a *déjeuner à la fourchette*, worse than that I have often seen placed before vagrants in the soup kitchens of Sydney or Melbourne. Such treatment, however, was "quite the thing" fifty years ago. It not only sharpened the appetite - it sharpened the "wits" of young "gentlemen." Being one of the youngest and smallest of boys in M. Worms' school, I had to submit to the will of my seniors. The private store of our schoolmaster was in a large room on the upper floor. The skylight of our dormitories enabled us to



have access to the roof, and by dint of a clothes line a small boy could readily be lowered through the chimney into this receptacle of jam pots, tinned sardines, and other delicacies. What my elders (whose *education* was more advanced) conceived, I had to execute. Being lowered into the store room to secure "goodies" for my mates seemed quite a heroic achievement. This systematic burglary we carried on for some time, until one fine evening the line snapped. I dropped into the fireplace with a crash which brought in one of the ushers. A trial - when, all attempts to make me disclose the names of my companions having proved fruitless, I was sentenced to expulsion from the school.

This scandalous beginning in the world, and ignominious exit from my first school, though very disgraceful, have not been altogether devoid of good results. I have ever since been fully impressed with several important facts. First, that burglaries in the long run don't pay; second, that it is safer to get into a room by the door than through the chimney; third, it is always better to lower someone else after "goodies" than to be lowered one's self; and last, though not least, that it is not safe to trust one's body to a hemp rope. It may have been the means of keeping me from more mischief - who knows? *Pen and ink portrait of Jules Joubert Australian Town & Country Journal (Sydney) April 1875*

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ON THIS DAY 1875
 Floods were ravaging southern France, bringing offers of help from around the world, including Sydney. **Jules Joubert** made it known he wanted to present some concerts for flood relief and was gratified by the number of *artistes* who had come forward. A "French Lady" writing to the *Herald* expressed gratitude to Germans belonging to the glee club who had come forward with a "Christian offer" of help. She expressed hope the spirit of co-operation would spread and God would "cause that Germany and France may forget their mutual resentment and live henceforth in progress."
Sydney Morning Herald 8 July 2011

WAR CASTS SHADOW OVER SYDNEY EXHIBITION
 On this day in 1870 Australia's first international exhibition opened in Sydney. It was held in a specially erected pavilion in Prince Alfred Park, near Central Station, which will be remembered by many as housing the war museum. The energetic secretary of the Agricultural Society, **Jules Joubert**, organised the exhibition, which was opened by the NSW governor, the Earl of Belmore. Unfortunately, it coincided with the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, which cast a shadow over the festivities. The *Herald* commented: "The exultation which we might feel is abated by the intelligence from Europe. It is terrible to think that two nations, with rifled cannon, and the Chassepot rifle and needle guns, each commanding a million of men, have suddenly plunged into war."
Geeves on Monday, Sydney Morning Herald, 30 August 1982.